# THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

*ANDRÉ GIDE*

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THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

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# THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

*by*

ANDRÉ GIDE

*Translated from the French*
*by* DOROTHY BUSSY

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO

*EDMOND JALOUX*

IN FRIENDLY REMEMBRANCE OF
OUR CONVERSATIONS OF

1896

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# PREFACE

Among the confidences of every kind I am continually receiving, the private diary I here publish seems to me particularly deserving of attention. I give the letter which accompanied it to serve as preface.

1st August 1928

Sir:

After much hesitation I have decided to send you the enclosed typewritten copy of a diary left me by my mother. She died on October 12th, 1916 at the hospital of X, where she had spent five months nursing contagious cases.

I have not permitted myself to change anything in it except the proper names. If you think it not impossible that these pages may be read with profit by certain young women of the present day, I give you leave to publish them. In that case I should like to entitle them *The School for Wives*—that is to say, if you do not think it unbecoming to use this title after Molière's

play. Needless to say, the words "Part One," "Part Two," "Epilogue" have been added by me.

Please do not try to find out who I am and allow me to sign this letter with a name that is not my own.

Geneviève D.

# PART I

MY dear,

I feel it is to you that I am writing. I have never kept a journal—never indeed written anything at all except a few letters. I should no doubt write letters to you, if I didn't see you every day. But supposing I die first—I hope I shall, for life without you would be nothing but an empty desert—you will read these lines; and I shall feel I am leaving you less, if this part of me remains behind. But how can I think of death, when all life is before us? Ever since I have known you—that is, ever since I have loved you—life has seemed so beautiful, so useful, so precious, that I want not to lose any of it. I mean to preserve every crumb of my happiness in this book. And what else should I do every day after you have left me, but recall your presence and live over again the moments that have gone by all too quickly? Before I met you, it made me unhappy, as I have told you, to feel that my life was without an object. Nothing could be vainer,

it seemed to me, than all those society occupations which my parents encouraged, and which constitute my girl friends' whole pleasure. A life with no unselfish purpose in it could not satisfy me. You know I once had serious thoughts of becoming a sick nurse or a little sister of the poor. My parents shrugged their shoulders when I spoke of this. They were right in thinking that all such inclinations would vanish when I met the man of my soul's choice. Why will not Papa understand and accept that you are he?

Oh! how badly I write! I was crying when I wrote those last words, and they seem to me frightful. Why did I read them over again? I don't think I shall ever learn to write properly—at any rate, trying doesn't help me. Well, I was saying that before I met you, I was looking for some object in life; and now you are my object, my occupation, my very life itself, and I look for nothing more. I know that it is through you, by means of you, that I shall get what is best out of myself, that you must guide me, lead me to all good and beautiful things—to God. And I pray to God to help me vanquish my father's opposition, and I write my fervent prayer down here—as though that might make it more efficacious: Dear Lord! Do

not force me to disobey Papa. You know that I love Robert and that I can belong only to him.

To speak truthfully, it was only yesterday that I began to understand what the object of my life must be. Yes, it was our conversation in the Tuileries gardens that opened my eyes to the part Woman may play in the lives of great men. I am so ignorant, that unluckily I have forgotten the examples he gave me, but at any rate, I brought away this—that my whole life must be henceforth devoted to enabling him to accomplish his glorious destiny. Of course, that is not what he said, because he is modest; but it is what I thought, for if he is not proud, I am proud for him—though, in reality, I think that in spite of his modesty, he has a very clear conception of his own worth. He has not concealed from me that he is very ambitious. "Not for myself," he said with a charming smile, "but for the ideas I stand for." I wish my father could have heard him. But Papa is so obstinate about Robert, that he might have taken it for what he calls his. . . . No, I won't write it down. Why can't he see that talking like that is no slur upon Robert but upon himself? The very thing I like about Robert is that he has no

indulgence for himself; he never forgets his self-respect. In comparison with him, it seems to me there is no one who knows the meaning of real dignity. If he chose he could completely crush me with it. But when we are alone, he takes great care not to let me feel it. I think he sometimes even exaggerates a little, when he plays at being a child himself, so as not to make me feel too much of a schoolgirl beside him. And when yesterday I reproached him with this, he suddenly looked very grave, and putting his head down on my lap, for he was sitting at my feet, he murmured with a kind of exquisite melancholy, "The child is father of the man." It would really be the greatest pity for so many charming sayings to be lost. They are sometimes so weighty, so full of meaning. I mean to note down here as many as possible. He will feel glad to find them again later on, I feel sure.

It was immediately after this that we had the idea of the journal—I don't know why I say *we*. The idea was *his*, like all good ideas. Well! we both of us agreed—that is, each of us, individually—to write what he called "our story." It's easy for me, for it's only through him that I exist. But I doubt whether *he* will be able to manage it, even if he has the time.

And, in reality, I think it would be a bad thing for his mind to be too much occupied with me. I explained to him at length that I perfectly understood that he had his career, his thoughts, his public life, which my love must not interfere with; and that if it was right for *him* to be the whole of *my* life, *I* could not be—ought not to be—the whole of *his*. I should be curious to know what of all this he has noted; but we have taken a solemn vow not to show our journals to each other. "It is only so that they can be sincere," he said as he kissed me, not on my forehead, but exactly between the eyes, as he is fond of doing. On the other hand, we have agreed that the one of us who dies first is to bequeath his journal to the other. "Of course," I said rather foolishly. "No, no," he answered very gravely, "the promise we must make is not to destroy them."

You smiled, dear, when I said I should not know what to put in mine. And as a fact, I have already filled four pages. It is all I can do not to reread them; but if I reread them, it would be more than I could do not to tear them up. What surprises me is how much I am already beginning to enjoy this writing.

Robert has been suddenly called away to Perpignan to see his mother, about whom he has had rather bad news. "I hope it won't be anything," I said. "Yes, one always says that," he answered with a grave smile, which showed how much concerned he really was. And I at once reproached myself for my absurd remark. If all the commonplace actions I do and all the commonplace remarks I make were taken out of my life and conversation, what, I wonder, would remain? And to think that I had to come into contact with a superior being, before I was able to realize this! What I admire about Robert is that he does not say or do anything like ordinary people; and yet there is nothing affected or pretentious about him. I have been thinking for a long time what the best word would be to describe his appearance, his dress, his talk, his behavior; "original" is too marked; "individual" . . . "special" . . . no; the word "distinguished" is the one I come back to; and I wish the word had never been used for anyone else. I think he owes the extraordinary distinction of his manners and indeed, of his whole personality, to himself alone, for I gather from what he says that his family is rather middle-class. He says that he is not ashamed of his people; but

this in itself shows that a nature less noble and straightforward than his *might* be ashamed of them. His father, I believe, was in trade. Robert was still very young when he died. He does not seem to like speaking of him, and I am afraid to question him. I think he is very fond of his mother. "She is the only person you would have a right to be jealous of," he said to me in the early days of our engagement. He had a sister who was younger than he and who died.

I am going to take advantage of his being away and of the free time it leaves me, to write down how we became acquainted with each other. Mamma wanted to drag me off to a party at the Darblay's to hear a Hungarian 'cellist who is said to play remarkably well; but I pretended I had a bad headache, so that I might be left in peace and alone—with Robert. I can't understand how I could have been attracted so long by "the pleasures of society"; or rather, I understand now that what I really liked about them was having my vanity flattered. Now that the only thing I want is Robert's approval, I don't care at all about pleasing other people—or else only for his sake and because I see what pleasure it gives him; but in those far away days—which were such a short time ago—

how much I valued the smiles and applause and compliments—and even the envy and jealousy—of some of my friends! The day Ariella and I played Beethoven's fifth concerto together on two pianos (I did the orchestra part—rather brilliantly, I must admit), I pretended to be modest, but I was really very flattered at receiving more congratulations than she did. "It's all very well for Ariella—*she*'s a professional—but *Eveline!*" The people who applauded most were the ones who understood nothing about music. I knew they didn't, but all the same I was pleased with their praise, when I ought to have laughed at it. I even thought to myself that after all they had better taste than I had given them credit for. And so I let myself be taken in by all this absurd mummery. Yes, I see there might be a certain amusement in making fun of it. But when I am in company, I always seem to myself the most ridiculous person there. I know I am neither particularly pretty nor particularly witty, and I can't understand what Robert saw in me to fall in love with. The only talent I had for making a show in society was being able to play the piano fairly well; and now, well! a few days ago I gave up playing the piano for good. What's the use

of it? Robert doesn't like music. It's his only fault. But on the other hand he takes such an intelligent interest in painting that I'm surprised he doesn't paint himself. When I said this to him once, he smiled and explained that when one was "afflicted" (that is the word he used) with too many different gifts, the great difficulty was not to make too much of the ones that least deserved it. If he had really taken up painting, he would have had to sacrifice too many other things, and it was not by painting, he said, that in his opinion he would be best able to serve France. I think he wants to go in for politics, but he did not actually say so. For the matter, whatever he undertakes, I am certain he will succeed. And it even makes me rather sad to feel that he has so little need of my help in order to succeed in anything he attempts. But he is very kind and pretends he cannot get on without me; and the thought is so sweet that I indulge in it without believing it.

I get carried away into talking about myself, which I had determined not to do. How right Father Bredel is to warn us against the snare of selfishness, which, he says, sometimes takes on the mask of sacrifice and love. One likes sacrificing oneself, for the pleasure of

thinking oneself useful—and of hearing oneself called so. To be perfect, self-sacrifice should be known to God only and expect recognition and reward from Him alone. But I think nothing teaches one modesty better than to love someone with great qualities. It is when I am with Robert that I realize most all the things I am lacking in; yet of small account as I am, I long to add my little to his much. . . . But I started off to tell *our* story—and first of all, how we met.

It was six months and three days ago, on the 7th, April, 1908. My parents had promised me a tour in Italy as a reward for my prize at the Conservatoire; my uncle's death, however, and the difficulty of settling up his affairs because of the children's being under age, had delayed this plan, and I had given up all hopes of it, when my father suddenly took me off to spend the Easter holidays in Florence, leaving my mother at home to look after her small nieces. We stayed at Pension Girard, which Mme. de T. was quite right in recommending to us. It is much better than staying at a hotel. The only disadvantage is that one has to be punctual at meals; and if one takes them out the mistress of the pension has to be told beforehand, as there are not many boarders. They all hap-

pened to be quite a nice set of people; so that there was nothing unpleasant in having meals at the same table with them. Three Swedes, four Americans, two English, five Russians, and one Swiss. We were the only French people with Robert. Every kind of language was spoken; but especially French, because of the Russians, the Swiss and us three, and also of a Belgian, whom I had forgotten. None of the guests were disagreeable, but Robert's distinction outshone all the others. He sat opposite my father, who is rather reserved and often not very affable to people who are not in his set. As we were the last comers, it was natural enough for us not to take part in the conversation at once. Personally I should have liked to talk, but I couldn't very well be more forthcoming than Papa; so I was just as reserved as he, and as I was sitting next him, our silence made a kind of little island of coldness in the midst of the general animation. The amusing thing was that we could go nowhere without meeting the people of our pension. Papa simply had to answer their bows and smiles, and when we sat down to table, everyone knew that we had just come back from Santa Croce or the Palazzo Pitti. "It's a frightful nuisance," said Papa, but all the

same he began to unfreeze a little. As for Robert, we met him everywhere. When we went into a church or a picture gallery, the first thing we saw was sure to be Robert. "Goodness! There he is again!" cried Papa. At first Robert used to pretend not to see us, so as not to be indiscreet; for he was far too quick not to understand that these continual meetings irritated Papa. So he used to wait till Papa condescended to recognize him, and he never bowed first but pretended to be absorbed in the contemplation of some masterpiece. And sometimes Papa's bow was a long time coming, for it was specially to Robert that he was so standoffish. It was even rather embarrassing for me, for his standoffishness was so great that I must say it came very near being insolence. And it required a person with Robert's good temper not to take offence. But as I couldn't help smiling, he understood that, at any rate on my side, there was no ill-will. The colder Papa was, in fact, the harder I found it not to smile; but fortunately Papa did not notice this, for it went on rather behind his back. Robert had the good taste not to show that he saw and he never addressed me directly—a thing Papa would have taken very ill. I rather reproached myself for these little

goings-on, which in a way set up a tacit understanding between Robert and me unknown to Papa. But what was there to do?

What increased Papa's coldness was that Robert's "views" were not the same as his. I have never understood very clearly what Papa's "views" are, for I know nothing about politics; but I know that Mamma reproaches him with what she calls his materialism, and that Papa is not very fond of *curés*. When I was young, I used to be surprised that he was so good, for he never goes to mass, and I am inclined to think that it is not very true that "religion does not make people better," as he always says. Mamma says he is "stubborn," but I think he has a better heart than she has and when they have an argument together—which happens only too often—Mamma speaks to him in such a way that my sympathy goes to him rather than to her, even when I can't feel that he is in the right. He says he doesn't believe in Heaven, but Abbé Bredel replies that he will have to believe in it when he gets there, for he will certainly go there straight away and be saved in spite of himself. And I am sure he is right.

How sad such disputes are between couples as

thoroughly united as my parents, and about points too,on which, with a little give and take, it would be so easy to come to an understanding. In any case, there is nothing of the kind to be feared with Robert, for I have never seen him enter a church without praying, and all his ideas are generous and noble. I cannot believe that the *Action Française* is a "bad paper," as Papa says; he himself only reads the *Temps*, and I thought that mischief was brewing on the second day at Pension Girard, when Papa and Robert happened to be sitting alone together in the smoking-room. The drawing-room door was wide open and I could see them each in his armchair, with his newspaper in front of him. Robert, after he had looked through his, was rash enough to hand it to Papa with a few words I couldn't catch; but Papa got into such a rage that he upset his cup of coffee, which he had put on the arm of his chair, right over his light colored trousers. Robert made a great many apologies, but it really wasn't his fault. And while Papa was wiping himself with his handerkchief, Robert, who had caught sight of me in the drawing-room, expressed his regrets by a very discreet little dumb show, which he performed for my benefit, and which was so comic

that I couldn't forbear laughing; but I turned away at once, because it looked as if I were laughing at Papa.

And then lo and behold, on the sixth day, Papa had an attack of gout. . . . Oh! it is abominable of me to be pleased at that! And of course I offered to stay at home to keep him company and read to him, but the weather was very fine and he insisted on my going out. Then I made the most of his not being there, by going to the Spanish Chapel, because he is not very fond of the Pre-Raphaelites; and of course I met Robert there and I couldn't not speak to him. But after he had expressed his astonishment at seeing me alone and enquired politely after Papa's health, we talked of nothing but painting. I was almost glad of my ignorance, for it gave him an opportunity of explaining everything. He had a big book with him, but there was no need for him to open it, for he knows the names of all the old painters by heart. I could not quite succeed in sharing his predilection for the frescoes, which seem to me still very rudimentary, but I feel sure that everything he said was right, and my eyes were opened to a great many things I should never have found out by myself. And after that, I let him take me off to San Marco, where I felt as if I understood

painting for the first time in my life. It was so marvellous, losing oneself—forgetting oneself in a common admiration, that in front of Fra Angelico's great fresco, I unconsciously took his arm, and I didn't notice I had done so, until some other people came into the little chapel, where up to then we had been alone. For that matter, Robert didn't say anything that Papa mightn't have heard; but yet, when I got back to the pension, I didn't tell Papa of this meeting. It was no doubt wrong of me to hide a thing which had made such an impression on me that I could think of nothing else. But when, a little later, I confessed this sin of "lying by omission" to the abbé, he more or less reassured me; it is true that I told him of my engagement at the same time. The abbé knows that Papa doesn't approve of it, but he knows too that what prevents him from approving of it are Robert's opinions; and it is precisely because of his opinions that Mamma and the abbé approve of it. And then, Papa is so kind that he couldn't hold out for long. Besides, he says that what he cares about most is that I should be happy; and he can't doubt my happiness.

Before speaking of my engagement, I ought to have told about the last days in Italy; but I let my pen run

on as quickly as possible, so as to get to that wonderful word which turns all my other memories pale. . . . Before we left Florence, Robert asked Papa's leave to come and see us in Paris. I was terribly afraid he might refuse! But it turned out that Robert knew our De Berre cousins quite well, and they invited him to meet us at dinner, which made things much easier. The next day Robert came and paid his respects to Mamma, and a few days later he came again to ask for my hand. (What a stupid expression!) Mamma was a little surprised at first, and I was much more so, when she told me about it, for Robert had never really made me a declaration! He laughed a great deal, when I confessed this, and "declared" that it hadn't occurred to him, but that he was quite ready to make a "declaration," if I hadn't understood that he loved me. Then he took me in his arms, and I felt that *I* had no need to speak either for him to understand that I was wholly his.

A telegram has just been brought in. I let Mamma open it, though it was addressed to me.

"Robert's mother is dead," she said and handed me the telegram. I could only read one thing in it—that he is coming back to me on Wednesday.

13th October

A letter from Robert—but to Mamma—and I think she was pleased by this mark of deference. I can see that Mamma wishes to keep the letter, for it is a very beautiful one; and as I want to be able to reread it, I copy it out here.

Madame,

Eveline will forgive me for writing to you today rather than to her. I would not trouble her bright spirit with the sight of my grief, and it is to you I turn in my tears. Since yesterday there is no one but you to whom I can give the dear name of Mother, and I am sure you will let me transfer to you the respect and tenderness I felt for her whom I have just lost.

She in whose arms I first saw the light died yesterday in mine. She lost consciousness only a few hours before the end and still retained it while she received the last sacraments from the priest I called in. She faced death calmly, and seemed to suffer only for my grief. Her last happiness, she told me, had been to hear of my engagement and to know that she was not leaving me alone in the world. Would you repeat this

to Eveline and tell her that I shall never cease to regret that it was too late for Mamma to know her?

Believe, dear Mother, the feelings of affection and respect with which I already sign myself

Your son,

Robert D.

My poor dear, I should like to take part in your grief. I have tried to be unhappy—but I cannot. My heart is flooded with gladness, and every feeling that I share with you—even sorrow—is joy to me.

15th October

I have seen him. How beautiful his grief is! How dignified! I am beginning to understand him better. I think he has a horror of set phrases, for he talks to me of his loss with as much reserve as he first told me of his love. And he even avoids anything likely to be affecting, for fear of showing his emotion too much. In fact, there has been no reference between us to any but practical matters; and to Mamma he has only talked of the settling up of his mother's affairs and the sale of the property which is coming to him. I find it very difficult to fix my attention on such matters, and

I leave it to Mamma to go into them with Robert. I gather that we are going to be rich, and I am almost sorry for it; I should like to leave wealth to people who have need of it in order to be happy. But this is not a question of happiness. Robert says that he would have enough with anything, and that he only looks upon money as a weapon with which to uphold his ideas. He had a long talk about it with Father Bredel, who also says that one has no right to reject wealth, but that it brings with it the duty of doing good.

Poor Papa! He is out of all this. Every time he sees Abbé Bredel come into the room, he hurries off with a sketchy little bow: "So sorry! . . . Absolutely obliged to go out." I am always afraid the Abbé may take offence; but he is so kind, so conciliatory, that he pretends to believe in these very flimsy excuses.

"Monsieur Delaborde still as busy as ever!" he says to Mamma, who does her best to cover up Papa's rudeness by being extra civil herself. And I feel that if he were only to try the least little bit, he would get on so well with the Abbé. For *he* is very kind and good too.

"My dear little girl, the *curés* and I don't worship the same God," he answers, when I try to convince him. "Don't insist; I should get cross. You will per-

haps understand these things later, if you aren't too much like your Mamma." Then I am simply obliged to say that I hope I shall never understand these things, but that I must disapprove of "opinions" that come between my parents, both of whom I am equally fond of. It's these wretched "opinions" of his, too, that prevent him from liking my engagement.

"My dear child," he said to me, "I don't consider I have the right to oppose your marriage, and I dislike exercising authority. But don't ask me to approve of a decision I regret. All I can do is to hope you may not soon have cause to repent it.

19th October

This morning I asked Papa what fault he found with Robert. He looked at me a long time, screwing up his lips, without saying a word; then:

"I find no fault with him, my dear; I simply don't like him. If I were to tell you why, you would object, because you love him, and when one loves a person, one doesn't see him as he is."

"But it is because Robert is what he is that I love him," I exclaimed.

"Robert has taken you all in—the Abbé and your

Mamma and you—himself too, I am afraid, which is more serious."

"You mean, he doesn't believe what he says?"

"No, no; I believe he believes it. I am the one who doesn't believe it."

"But Papa, *you* don't believe anything."

"It can't be helped, my dear. I'm what your mother calls a sceptic."

And then we stopped, for conversations like these do nothing but distress us both. Poor Papa! I count on Robert to convert him—in time. He is so patient with Papa . . . so yielding, so clever. He takes care to avoid everything controversial (so does Papa, for that matter). He calls talking to Papa "the egg-dance," because he has to pirouette skilfully among delicate subjects without touching them. But how I wish Papa could hear him sometimes when he talks to me, as he talks when Papa isn't there! In Papa's presence I feel he is on his guard; but as soon as he lets himself go, his whole person becomes animated and he says such wonderful things that I want to write them down at once. And then he is so witty too and funny. As Laure de Berre said the other day, "One never tires of listening to him." That was last Thursday; we had lunched with

Robert at my cousins'. Maurice de Berre and Papa went out directly after lunch; then Robert talked to us for a long time about Perpignan, about the little jealousies of provincial life he is so familiar with, about the society in which he used to live and which he wouldn't go back to for a kingdom. To hear him talk of all the quaint people who made up his parents' set makes me quite sorry I never knew them; but of course I understand that a superior mind like Robert's must have found such surroundings stifling. He was so anxious to escape from this atmosphere that at first he thought of taking orders, for he is exceedingly pious by nature; then he realized he might do more good by mixing in active life. Abbé Bredel approves, and I agree with him that such a light ought not to be "put under a bushel"—to quote Scripture like him. When one hears Robert talk, one can't help longing for other people to hear him too. This is a thing I can't be jealous about, and I feel it would be impious to keep such a treasure to myself. The object of my life must be to help him with all my might to make the most of himself.

Next week we are to pay some visits together. I am looking forward to introducing him to our friends.

26th October

I have been leading such a giddy life for the last few days! Every day I have been hoping to find a little time to write my diary in. But it's not only time that is wanting. Even in the moments when I am alone, I can no longer find the necessary quiet of mind for thinking. I am living in a whirl—visits, shopping, dinners, theatres—to which Robert fortunately doesn't mind accompanying me, in spite of his mourning, for, as he says, true feeling is quite independent of conventions; and besides, I think, in reality, the joy of feeling himself loved is stronger than his grief. He goes shopping with me too, and orders all sorts of things for me, which he tries to persuade me will be of the greatest use to us. It amuses him so much, and he so obviously enjoys spoiling me, that I don't attempt to stop him as much as I ought. We chose a love of a ring together, which I must confess delights me and which I never tire of admiring. But when he wanted to give me a bracelet too, I refused point-blank, in spite of what he said to try to persuade me to accept it—that buying jewels was not so much spending money as making an "investment"; that is the word he used. I did not understand it at first, but he explained that

precious stones and metals are "certain to increase in value." I declared that it was a matter of perfect indifference to me, and then we had a little quarrel. I suppose it was not very nice of me to say that I should have liked my ring as much if I hadn't known that it had cost a great deal of money; upon which he exclaimed: "You might just as well say at once that you prefer trash." Then, as always happens with him—and that's what makes him so interesting—he widened the question and looked at it "from the general point of view," which is the only one he cares about.

"People imitate pearls so well nowadays," he explained, "that anybody may be taken in; but real pearls represent a fortune, and the others have only the *appearance* of value."

He likes to be there when I try my dresses on, because his taste is marvellous, and a discussion with the dressmakers amuses him. He came with me too to choose my hats. I find it very difficult to get accustomed to the new shapes. Robert thinks they suit me very well, but when I look at myself in the glass, I seem unrecognizable. I think, though, that it is probably a matter of habit and that soon, as he says, it is my young girl's face that will seem strange to me. In

general, I think he chooses things that are too fine, but I understand that he wants me to do him honour, and that I have no longer the right to be modest. The Abbé knows that I still am in my heart of hearts, and he says that is the only thing that matters. Every day I am astonished afresh at my happiness and never cease thinking myself unworthy of it. I am afraid sometimes that Robert may find out how much he has overestimated my good qualities. But perhaps, by dint of love, I shall succeed in raising myself to his level. I hope so with all my heart and continually strive to. He helps me too with such patience.

30th October

Robert is amazing. He knows all sorts of celebrated people and has acquaintances in every kind of set. This enables him to be of great service when people ask for help; and as everyone knows how kind he is, they don't hesitate. He says that it shows great wisdom in life never to ask for anything one isn't certain of getting. But as the people he has obliged refuse him nothing, and as he only asks for things that are right, he easily gets everything he wants. All doors are open to him and I never go with him anywhere without seeing

people come up to him from all sides. I have asked him to introduce me only to his real friends; but, as soon as one knows him a little, it is difficult not to become his friend, and as he is so well up in every subject, he is able to talk to anybody about anything as if it were his own special line. To tell the truth, I don't think he has any intimate friends. I asked him the other day. He didn't answer in so many words, but pressing me tenderly to his heart, he said: "Friendship is the antechamber of love." And, indeed, I feel now that the great friendship I had so lately for Ariella and Yvonne was only a makeshift and that my first real friend is Robert.

He wants to surprise Papa by getting him decorated. As he knows the Minister of Education's private secretary very well, he declares there will be no difficulty. Papa will certainly not refuse, and in reality I think he will be very pleased. It is very charming of Robert to think of Papa and not to ask for the decoration for himself; but he doesn't attach any importance to it and knows he can have it whenever he wants. When I hear him talking to the distinguished people he introduces me to, I realize my ignorance; I hardly dare to take part in the conversation, I am so afraid of dis-

Robert

gracing him. I have asked him to draw me up a list of books I ought to read, and as soon as I have a little time . . . But when will that be? We have decided to get married at the end of January. It seems a terribly long way off, and yet the days flash by with the most alarming rapidity. Directly after the wedding we are to go to Tunisia. It will not be merely a pleasure trip. Robert has an interest in some agricultural concern out there and he wants to give it an eye. He says there is no greater pleasure than one which can be turned to some advantage. His mind is never unemployed. He is always learning and manages to find profit in everything.

The great question that is occupying us is where we are to live. We have gone over numbers of flats, but in every one either Mamma, or Robert, or I find some drawback. I think we are going to come to some arrangement with an architect Robert knows very well. He has just finished building a block of flats which is very well situated in the neighbourhood of La Muette, with a view over some big gardens. We propose to become owners of the top floor, and in that case we should be able to arrange our rooms to suit ourselves. We spend hours together discussing plans and it is ex-

tremely amusing. Robert, who during his mother's life was not very well off, has contented himself during the last three years with a little ground-floor flat in the Avenue d'Antin, where he was beginning to feel very cramped. He had to take his meals at the restaurant, which took up a great deal of time and was very bad for his digestion. I asked him to show me his diggings. He seemed a little bit ashamed of them. But I was surprised to find everything so neat. All his papers are arranged in folders or jackets, and he has invented an extraordinary system of filing which enables him to get at any piece of information he wants about any particular person in the smallest possible time. That is how he is able to be of service so easily. He considers that people as a rule are lacking in method and that society's machinery is, as he says, out of gear. He likes quoting La Fontaine's line "*C'est le fonds qui manque le moins*," and declares that the important thing is to make the most of what one possesses. I think this is true, especially of anyone who is as greatly gifted as he; but when I say that *my* "*fonds*" is not worth much, he protests and says very charmingly that many women who keep salons and shine in society are much less intelligent than I am. He seems to say so in all

sincerity, and I am decidedly afraid that he is full of illusions about his future wife. I hope it will be a long time before he loses them. At any rate, as soon as I have a little time, I mean to work hard at cultivating myself as much as possible, and strive day by day to become less unworthy of him.

I was very anxious to know whether he on his side has been able to find time to keep his journal, as we promised each other, and I asked him to show it to me—oh, not to give it me to read, but just to let me see it. To tell the truth, I was afraid he might leave it lying about, but he reassured me; the drawer where he keeps it is always carefully locked. He showed me the drawer, but refused to take out the diary—even after I had promised not to open it.

3rd November

Yesterday we had the painter Bourgweilsdorf to dine with us. In spite of his frightful name—I really don't know whether I have spelt it properly—he is neither a German nor a Jew, but a very worthy young man, whom Robert has been exceedingly kind to, and who has chocked up the little Avenue d'Antin flat with a quantity of quite unsalable pictures, which Robert buys

out of charity, so as to help him without wounding his pride. I told Robert that I thought it was very imprudent to encourage such a hopeless failure, and that it would be better to urge him to do anything in the world rather than paint; but it appears that the poor young man is incapable of doing anything else and, what is more, thinks he is very gifted. Robert himself, for that matter, persists in saying that he has "a certain talent," and we had a little quarrel over it, for really one has only to glance at any one of Bourgweilsdorf's horrors to see that he doesn't know his business and that he hasn't the remotest notion of what painting ought to be. Then Robert quoted a lot of painters who have become celebrated and who at first were considered mere daubers. And as he was getting a little cross, because I couldn't sincerely succeed in thinking what he showed me was good, "You may be sure," he said peremptorily, "that if he were worthless I should not care for him." (But, all the same, Robert doesn't dare hang his frightful things—he keeps them stuffed away in a big cupboard, where I discovered them, when I was poking around his flat, as he gave me leave to do.) Robert's tone was so snubbing (it was the first time he has ever spoken to me like

that) that the tears came into my eyes. He noticed it and became very tender again at once, kissed me, and said:

"What do you say to making his acquaintance? You could judge for yourself then whether he is really as stupid as you think."

I agreed and that is how we invited him to dinner.

Well! I here apologize to Robert. I thought Bourgweilsdorf almost charming. I say "*almost*" because all the same there is one thing about him which seems to me rather shocking—and that is his want of gratitude towards Robert. Bourgweilsdorf seems really too forgetful of what he owes him, and is actually sometimes wanting in deference. I know that it doesn't mean much, coming from him, and that the cordial way in which he said it made up for the roughness of what he said; but I heard him interrupt Robert more than once by exclaiming: "That's all rubbish, you know," after Robert had made an extremely sensible remark, to which he had not even listened. On the other hand, he approved of everything Papa said with such courteous, smiling insincerity that it almost took one in, and Papa, as a matter of fact, was enchanted. I expected to see a Bohemian-looking person, but he

is quite a gentleman, well—not to say rather elegantly —dressed, well groomed, and well-mannered. He is certainly intelligent. He tells a great many stories very amusingly, and his conversation would be delightful if he were not rather too fond of paradoxes. One is never quite certain that he isn't laughing at one, as for instance when he says that Raphael and Poussin are his two favourite painters, which one would really never suppose from his own style of painting. On the whole, however, it was a very pleasant evening and I shall be delighted to see our Bourg again. But it's rather a long step from that to ordering him to paint my portrait, as Robert suddenly did. Neither he nor I was expecting it, so that we didn't know what to say and it was extremely awkward. I must say I think Robert might have consulted me first. I should have told him that between now and our wedding it would be very difficult for me to find time to sit and that we should have to put off "that pleasure" until after we came back from our honeymoon. That's what I said to Bourgweilsdorf when, at Robert's suggestion, he tried to fix an appointment for the first sitting. He declared that three or four would be enough; that he could take notes and sketch in the portrait from

memory, so as to have a few finishing touches to put in when we come back. To tell the truth, when I think of his horrible daubs, I don't at all care for the idea of being painted by him. However, we have settled on a day for visiting his studio.

7th November

Shopping, parties, visits. I have no time for my diary; no time for reading, for reflection; no time for feeling myself happy. And what distresses me most is that it all tends towards making me frightfully selfish. Every day the only object in life seems to be my pleasure, my clothes, my tastes. As if I could ever have any other pleasure or tastes than Robert's! What pleases me most, even about the furniture for my own sitting-room, is that he should choose it. He has made me a present of an exquisite little writing-table, where I shall be able to keep his letters and my journal. It is to stay in the shop until we settle in. I am longing for the time when I shall be in my own home and able to recover myself a little. This round of dissipation seems so empty . . . and I even feel as if I were losing sight of Robert too, as well as of myself. For though it is true that I am nearly always with him, we are hardly

ever alone together; one has to be all the time in public; smiling to one and another, answering stupid questions, exhibiting one's happiness; and such constant preoccupation with the desire of *appearing* happy would almost prevent me from *being* so—that is, if all this show could be taken seriously for a single moment. The air of deep conviction which the most indifferent people put on to assure me of their sympathy never fails to astonish me; but I have to fall in with this pretence and look "delighted to make the acquaintance" of people who are perfectly insignificant or disagreeable.

12th November

I have been seeing a good deal of Yvonne lately. I feel when I am talking to her how easy it is for happiness to become selfish. What deceives me is that I think of Robert more than of myself. But when I think of him, I am only following the inclination of my heart. It is of course not a matter of thinking of him less, but of not confining my love to him alone. I have had eyes only for him and did not notice how ill Yvonne was looking till last Thursday. Then my eyes were suddenly opened—or rather the dazzling cloud in which

I have been living cleared away; she looked so changed that I felt frightened; then I questioned her, till at last she confessed the reason of her great trouble. She has just discovered that the young man whom I knew she loved and to whom she was practically engaged is deceiving her and is living with another woman.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" I asked.

"I was afraid of disturbing your happiness."

And then I felt ashamed of this happiness of mine, which was like a kind of private property with a harsh "No admittance" marked up on it. No, no, I don't want a *pitiless* happiness. Yvonne has missed my friendship sadly and she is in need of help. She is afraid she will not be able to stop loving this man, though he no longer deserves her love, and she wants to find an occupation that will help her to forget her unhappiness a little. She would like to be employed in a hospital, which seems to me an excellent idea—at any rate for the moment. Of course, as I promised her, I shall keep silent as to the reasons of her determination, but I shall try to enlist Robert's help. He is very attentive to Yvonne and he knows the head physician at Laënnec very well. He may recommend Yvonne with confidence, for I have no doubt that, with her devo-

tion and intelligence and ability, she will be able to be of the greatest service.

14th November

How kind Robert is! I had no sooner told him what Yvonne wanted than he telephoned to Dr. Marchant and made an appointment with him for dinner tomorrow evening. He has invited him to the Tour d'Argent, which is famous for its cooking. "You wouldn't believe how many things are brought off by a good dinner," he said to me, laughing. He declares that my presence will be very useful and has persuaded Papa to let me go. I am looking forward to it very much, because anything I do with Robert amuses me—and it shows Papa is beginning to be a little more reconciled to our marriage. Besides, I have hardly ever dined in a restaurant before, and if, in addition, it may do Yvonne a good turn . . . Robert says that Dr. Marchant is rather surly, but extremely appreciative of good food; so he means to take particular pains with the menu.

I am often afraid of vexing Robert by using certain words and expressions in my talk, which, he says, are not correct, and which I have fallen into the habit of saying because I hear them continually round about me.

When we are alone, Robert takes me up and corrects me. But when we are in company, I often keep silent for fear of suddenly seeing a little sign of annoyance on Robert's face, which, though no one else notices it, tells me that I have expressed myself incorrectly. However, I must make up my mind to talk to Dr. Marchant and I am rather terrified at the idea. I know myself. If I think too much about my behaviour, I become self-conscious and affected. I have begged Robert not to look too much at me during the dinner. I can read his face so well, and if I saw the slightest shadow of disapproval on it, I should be too upset. For instance, nothing irritates him so much as the use of the word "very" before a past participle, which, as he says quite rightly, is very different from an ordinary adjective. He pointed out what I had never thought of before —that one can say "very angry," but not "very annoyed," and "very glad," but not "very pleased."

I think I grasp the shade of difference, but now I hardly dare use the word "very" for fear of making a mistake. One hasn't always time to think whether the word that follows is a past participle or an adjective or a past participle used as an adjective or an adjective used as . . . And really I think Robert pushes it a

little too far. He says I may say "very tired" and yet "tired" is a past participle. He began to explain that it was *used* as an adjective, but I think he got slightly mixed himself, because he suddenly stopped his little grammar lesson and put it off till another time. I want, however, to understand these rules thoroughly and to get into the habit of applying them; for Robert considers it ought to be women's special business to maintain the purity of the language, because they are in general more conservative than men, and for them to be slovenly in their speech is to fail in one of their duties.

16th November

"My hat!" cried Papa, when he heard we had dined at the Tour d'Argent (this is his favourite little swear-word), "you certainly do yourselves well!" He told me he had never been there himself, but that he knew it was *the* gourmets' restaurant. And I had to go through all the menu in detail for him. It was an excellent dinner and the wine was marvellous, as far as I could judge by Robert's and our guest's expression as they sipped it; for personally I don't know very much about it. But what an odious man Dr. Marchant is!

"Idle young ladies are the very deuce!" he cried at Robert's first words about Yvonne. It was almost at the end of dinner and when Robert thought that our guest had been sufficiently "warmed up." Then he went on in words whose rudeness was accentuated by the surly way in which he said them:

"Of course, she's not the first to pester me. I have always refused such offers of service most unsympathetically. Sisters of mercy are all very well—they have ceased to be women, it seems. But society young ladies! Æsculapius forbid! Tell your friend from me that she had better get married. It's much the best thing a woman can do, believe me. I don't mind saying so before you, mademoiselle," he added, turning to me with his ugly smile, "as I see you think so too."

"My friend has good reasons for not doing as I do," I ventured to say, plucking up my courage and feeling that Yvonne's future was at stake. But my courage failed me at the jeering way in which he raised his eyebrows and said with a sarcastic query:

"Oh, indeed . . .?"

I was on the point of exclaiming that every woman couldn't hope for the happiness of finding a Robert, but I merely said in a very flat way that all marriages

were not happy. To which Dr. Marchant immediately answered that if the married state was not always good, the unmarried was always bad. "For women, at any rate," he added quickly with a disagreeable chuckle, before I had time to ask him why, in that case, he was still a bachelor. Then, seeing, no doubt, that he had gone too far, he went on in a more conciliatory tone:

"No, but, between ourselves, mademoiselle, is your friend *really* so anxious to be a nurse under me?"

"I know she has always been very devoted to nursing," I began rashly; and then I felt Robert's glance fixed upon me and realized my grammar mistake, so that I didn't dare finish my sentence, and Dr. Marchant was able to go on.

"And accomplishments? What's the use of accomplishments? Why were they invented if not to give idle young women something to do? Advise your friend to do cross-stitch or paint in water-colours, since she refuses to produce children, as her duty is—though I suppose we can't very decently force her to do it."

I no doubt showed how revolting I thought his remarks; for he very soon turned the conversation, after having added peremptorily·

"Besides, even if I was willing to employ your friend,

I shouldn't be able to find anything for her to do. We are over-staffed as it is, and I can't endure people loafing around looking at me."

So Robert has had all his expense and trouble for nothing. It's what he calls being "sold." It was easy to see by his face how much he disliked it. And I was exceedingly touched, because it was only for love of me that he took an interest in Yvonne and made these advances. I did not hide from him my opinion of Dr. Marchant. He may be a great man of science, as Robert declares, but he is an ill-mannered boor and I hope I shall never see him again, in spite of Robert's repeating: "I haven't done with him yet," as he did several times when he was seeing me home after dinner.

And it's not even as if Yvonne expected any remuneration for her services! She has enough to live on and her offer was entirely disinterested. How shall I have the heart to tell her that it has been rejected and that no one has any need of her devotion?

Useless! To know, to feel that one is useless! To feel that one has in one the power to help, to succour, to spread joy around one, and to be refused the means!

"You are not wanted, mademoiselle!"

How dreadful! I pity Yvonne with all my heart and

I am all the more grateful to God for having spared me such bitterness, and to Robert for having chosen me. But to think that so many women, less fortunate than I, are denied their share of life—to think that their right to an existence with some purpose in it, the exercise of their gifts and virtues, should be subject to some man's more or less kind permission—this enrages me. And I here register a vow that if ever I have a daughter, I will teach her none of those "accomplishments" which Dr. Marchant referred to so scornfully, but I will have her seriously educated, so that she may have no need of arbitrary indulgences, concessions, and favours.

I am well aware that what I have written here is absurd, but the feeling that inspired it is not. I consider it perfectly natural that in marrying Robert I should give up my independence (I have shown my independence in marrying him in spite of Papa); but every woman ought at any rate to be free to choose the slavery she prefers.

17th November

Robert is busy collecting capital to start a literary paper, of which he is to be the political editor. The paper is not to come out till we get back from Tunis

—that is to say, not till next spring; but it is best to get everything ready before we leave, which we shall do immediately after our wedding—very soon now. The care and attention he lavishes upon me do not interfere with his other activities, I am thankful to say. I should love him less if I were to be the only object of his life. I am here to help him and not to distract him from his career. It is beyond me—higher than me that he must look.

19th November

Every day brings me a fresh joy. What was not my surprise this morning when Robert showed me a letter he had just received from Dr. Marchant! He seems to have forgotten—or else to be ashamed of—everything he said the other evening and asks for Yvonne to go to see him at the hospital, as he wishes to talk over what can be done for her or with her.

I have not seen Yvonne again yet, and so I shall not have to tell her of my first disappointment, but only of the fortunate final result.

22nd November

This morning I behaved with great weakness, but how is it possible to refuse Robert anything? I was in

Eveline

the little drawing-room, and as I was not expecting him to come so early, I had taken out my diary and was preparing to write an account of our evening at the Russian Ballet yesterday, when he suddenly came in and asked to see what I was writing. I answered laughingly that he would only see it after my death, in accordance with our agreement. To which he answered, laughingly too, that in that case he ran the risk of never seeing it at all, for in the natural course of things I should survive him; that, moreover, he had never taken our agreement seriously and that he was quite willing to cancel it; that, on the other hand, we had promised never to hide anything from each other; and that in any case his desire to read my journal was so strong that his whole happiness might be spoilt if I did not at once satisfy it. In short, he was so pressing, so obstinate, so tender, that I yielded; and, after making the request that he would do the same by me, to which he willingly consented, I left the room to let him read it at his ease.

But now the charm is broken; and that is what I feared. If I am adding these lines, it is only to explain why they are the last. Evidently it was for him that I kept my journal, but I cannot write about him any

more as I used to, if only out of reserve and decency. And let him read these lines too—I do not wish to hide them from him.

No; I do not love him less; but henceforth he will know it only directly. (This sentence is perhaps nonsense; but it came from my pen naturally.)

23rd November

Alas! I must add yet another postscript.

Robert has just made me very unhappy. This is the first grief he has occasioned me and I am very sorry to write it down here, as I had hoped that this book would contain nothing but expressions of my joy. But I must write it down here all the same; and I hope he will read what I am now writing, for when just now I said it to him, he would not take my words seriously.

I went to see him this morning, thinking that he in his turn would show me his journal, as he promised me yesterday, before I gave him mine to read. And now he confesses his journal does not exist, that he only allowed me to think he was writing it for so long in order to encourage me to go on with mine. He confessed all this, laughing, and was astonished and then annoyed because I did not laugh too and was

not amused by his trick. And when, on the contrary, I was unhappy about it and reproached him—not indeed with not having kept a journal, for I understand that he had no time to—but for letting me think he was keeping it—for duping me—he then began to reproach *me* for taking offence, for exaggerating a thing that is of no importance, without understanding that what makes me unhappy is just that a thing that has so much importance for me has so little for him, and that he can treat so lightly what touches me so deeply.

And soon it will not be he who was in the wrong for not keeping his word, but I who am in the wrong for objecting to it. And yet it is no pleasure to me to be in the right rather than he; I should be glad to think that he was in the right; but, at any rate, I should have wished him to show some regret for having caused me so much pain.

I feel I am ungrateful to complain like this and I beg his pardon. But I must decidedly now stop my journal, for there is really no longer any object in it.

# PART TWO

## TWENTY YEARS AFTER

Arcachon, 2nd July 1914

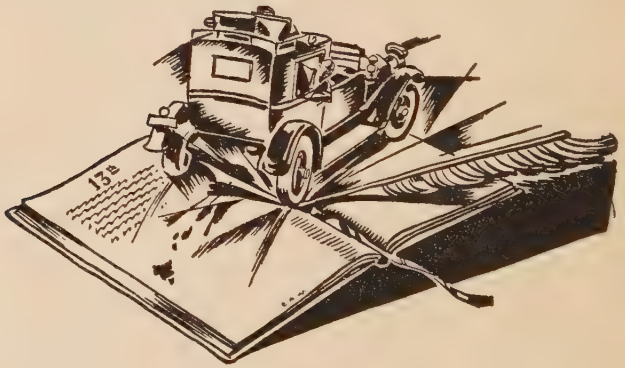
I brought this book away with me as one brings a piece of needlework—to serve as an occupation during the idle hours of a cure. But if I am beginning to write in it again, it is no longer, alas, for Robert, who thinks he knows all I am capable of feeling and thinking; it is to help me put my thoughts in order, to help me see clear in my own mind and, like Corneille's Émilie, to consider

"*Et ce que je hasarde et ce que je poursuis.*"

When I was young, I could see nothing in this line but mere redundancy; it seemed to me ridiculous, as things often seem that one fails to understand; as the same line seemed ridiculous and redundant to my son and daughter, when I made them learn the speech by heart. No doubt we must have had some experience in order to understand that we can only hope to attain in life the things we *pursue* by *risking* what may be very

dear to us. What I am now pursuing is my deliverance; what I risk is the world's and my two children's esteem. The world's esteem, I try to persuade myself, I do not care about. My children's esteem is very dear to me; and as I write, I feel more deeply than ever how dear it is. I even wonder whether it is not especially for them that I am writing; if later on they happen to read these lines, I should like them to find a justification, or at any rate an explanation of my conduct in them; for they will no doubt be taught to judge me with severity—to condemn me.

Yes, I know, I repeat it to myself continually: by leaving Robert I shall put myself, to all appearance, entirely in the wrong. I know nothing of the law, but I am afraid that my refusal to continue living with



him may entail the forfeiture of my maternal rights. I hope the lawyer I mean to consult on my return to Paris may enable me to avoid this. It would be intolerable. I cannot consent to give up my children. But neither can I consent to go on living with Robert. The only way by which I can escape hating him is never to see him any more. Oh! above all, never to hear him talk any more. . . . As I write this, I feel that I hate him already; and in spite of the odiousness of these words, I think it was the need to write them that made me open this book again. For this is a thing I can say to no one. I remember the time when Yvonne shrank from talking to me for fear of casting a shade over my happiness. It is now my turn to be silent. And, for that matter, would she understand me? . . . It is more likely her husband would—the man I judged at first as selfish and vulgar, and whom I now know to have so warm a heart. I have sometimes detected in Dr. Marchant, who is a really superior man, an indescribable contempt for Robert; I remember, for instance, an occasion when Robert was repeating a conversation he had had, in which, of course, he gave himself the *beau rôle*, and after quoting his own words in his self-complacent way, added:

"I thought that was what I ought to say to him."

"And what did he think he ought to answer you?" asked Dr. Marchant.

Robert looked for a moment slightly dashed. He feels that Marchant sizes him up and he finds it extremely unpleasant. I think it is for my sake that Marchant refrains from openly deriding him; for I have sometimes known him exceedingly caustic to certain persons whose conceit drove him irresistibly to crush them. He is certainly no dupe to Robert's high-sounding sentences. It has even occurred to me more than once that if it were not for his affection for me, he would have given up frequenting him long ago. And that evening I felt a kind of relief at feeling I was not the only one to be exasperated by the habit Robert has fallen into of always saying "he thinks he ought" to do what he simply does because he wants to do it. Lately he has improved even upon this; he now says: "I consider it my duty to . . ." as if he never acted except from the highest moral considerations. He has a way of talking of duty which is enough to make one take a loathing to all "duties," a way of making use of religion which casts suspicion on all religion, and

of playing on noble sentiments so as eternally to disgust one with them.

3rd July

I had to interrupt this in order to take Gustave to the doctor's. Thank God, the result of the consultation was very reassuring. Marchant had alarmed us so that fortunately the trouble was taken in hand soon enough. The doctor here, who is attending Gustave very carefully, even declares that there will soon be no reason to fear any future relapse. He thinks that at the end of the holidays Gustave will be able to go back to the *lycée*, so that this scare will not have caused any delay in his studies.

I am not very well pleased with what I wrote yesterday. I let my pen run on, I think, out of a need for recrimination which, until I have explained myself better, may appear very vain. We all have our faults, and I know that harmony cannot be maintained between a married couple without indulgence and small mutual concessions. How is it that I find Robert's faults so intolerable? Is it because the very thing that exasperates me today is just the very thing I formerly found so beguiling, the very thing that charmed me and that

seemed worthy of the highest praise? Oh! I must needs admit it; it is not he who has changed; is it I; the judgments that I form today are different. So that even my happiest memories are marred. Ah! from what a Heaven I have fallen! In order to understand the change that has come over me, I have reread what I wrote in this book a few years ago. It is with the greatest difficulty I am able to recognize myself in the candid, confiding little simpleton of a girl I then was! I can still hear those remarks of Robert's that filled me with such joy and love and pride—but I now interpret them differently. I try to retrace the history of that distrust from which I am now suffering. I think it began on a certain day, not long after our marriage, when my father was exclaiming over the perfection of Robert's system of filing and asked him whether he had found it himself, and Robert answered in an indefinable tone, which was at once superior and modest, profound and detached:

"Yes . . . I found it by dint of searching."

Oh! it was hardly anything, and at the moment I attached no importance to it. . . . But as I knew that this improved system of filing came out of a stationer's shop in the Rue du Bac, where I had just been

to pay a bill, it did perhaps occur to me that there was no need for the inspired, the almost agonized look, the inventor's look, that he "thought he ought to put on," when he said: "I found it." Yes, yes, I know, my dear, you found it in the Rue du Bac; why say "by dint of searching"? Or then you should have added: "searching for envelopes in a stationer's shop." It flashed upon me then that a man of science, after making a real discovery, would never think of saying: "I found it by searching," for that would be a simple matter of course; and I saw that those words in Robert's mouth served only to dissemble the fact that he had invented nothing himself. My poor dear Papa was perfectly blind to all this. And as for me, everything I have just said only became clear to me later on. At the same time, I simply felt instinctively there was something or other that rang false. For that matter, Robert did not say the words with any intention of deceiving Papa. The little sentence escaped him unconsciously; but that is just what made it so self-revealing. It was not Papa he was taking in—it was himself.

For Robert is no hypocrite. He imagines that he really has the sentiments that he expresses. And I think even that in the long run he actually does have them,

that they come at his call—the finest, the most generous, the most noble, always exactly those that it is proper—those that it is advantageous—to have.

I doubt, however, whether there are many people who are taken in by them; but they behave as if they were. A kind of convention is established; and it is not perhaps so much that people are really duped as that they pretend to be duped for convenience' sake. Papa, who first of all seemed clear-sighted enough, at the very time when I was most dazzled, and whose opinion of Robert distressed me so much during my engagement, now seems to have completely come round to him. In every one of my disagreements with Robert he always takes sides against me. He is so good-hearted, so weak! And Robert so clever! As for Mamma . . . There are days when I feel terribly lonely; I can only say what I think in this book, and I have begun to be attached to it as to a discreet and docile friend to whom I can at last confide my most secret and most painful thoughts.

Robert thinks he knows me; he does not suspect that I may have a life of my own, apart from him. He no longer considers me as anything but a dependant of his. I form part of his comfort. I am his wife.

5th July

Whenever anyone new appears on the scene, I feel, I know, that Robert's first concern is to find out how to get round him—how to get hold of him; even in those of his acts which are apparently the most generous and in which he shows himself the most obliging to other people, I feel at the back of his mind the desire to lay other people under obligation. And how naïve he is about it! How natural! . . . In the early days, before he had learnt to be suspicious of me, remarks would escape him of the most telltale nature, such as: "I have a very poor reward for my kindly feelings"—as if kindly feelings should expect a reward from others; and I used to shudder when I heard him say: ". . . After what I have done for so-and-so, he can refuse me nothing."

This was the whole aim and object of the review that Robert edited for four years, and that he only gave up a year ago, after he had changed his red ribbon into a rosette. Under an appearance of impartiality, it was merely a kind of mutual aid and benefit society. Every complimentary article was considered by Robert as equivalent to a letter of credit. He is extraordinarily clever too at making out that he is doing people a

service when in reality he is making use of them. What would the few articles he contributed to the review have been like without that young secretary of his who put them on their feet, rewrote them—re-(so to speak) thought them . . . ? But when he speaks of that charming, discreet, remarkably gifted exquisitely mannered young man, I have heard him exclaim:

"What would that young fellow be now, if it hadn't been for me?"

To listen to Robert, the review's only object was to help on artists of unrecognized talent, to make them known, "to impose them on the public," as he phrased it; but at the same time it also helped him to push himself. Yes, no doubt Robert did a great deal to bring Bourgweilsdorf's extraordinary talent to light—Bourgweilsdorf, who combined so much pride with such exquisite modesty, and so sincerely despised the favour of the public. But the astonishing increase in the value of his pictures, due to the campaign so adroitly organized by the review after Bourgweilsdorf's death, enabled Robert to sell two canvases of what he calls "his gallery" for a great deal more than he paid for all the others together. They have all now been taken out of their cupboards, where he kept them for so long,

and paraded on the walls, so that Robert can solemnly say to his son: "It is rare indeed that God in the long run fails to recompense us."

Ah! how I wish I could see him, if only for once, defend a cause for which he would really have to compromise himself, experience sentiments from which he could derive no advantage, have convictions which would be of no benefit to him! . . .

When he invited Papa and our de Berre cousins and even the dear and simple-hearted Bourgweilsdorf, who was still so badly off, to invest money in the printing company, which afterwards failed so miserably, it seemed as though he were doing them a favour; "the shares were very much sought after; he could only dispose of a limited number, which as a special favour he could let his friends benefit by. . . ." We all thought: "How kind Robert is!" For neither I nor anyone else then understood that all these shares which he got his friends to take assured him a majority, increased his importance, and were tantamount to assets of real value.

And after the failure what fine phrases he found to excuse himself in his own eyes for the heavy losses which his imprudence had brought on them!

"My poor dear friends. . . . They have had a fine reward for the confidence they put in me. That's what comes of trying to help other people. It is enough to disgust one altogether from doing good," etc. When it would have been so simple to reimburse without more ado Bourgweilsdorf at any rate, who had risked his money in this affair because of Robert's insistence and Robert's guarantee. As for Robert, *he* managed to get out of it with the minimum of loss, having "liquidated his situation," as he admitted to me later on, in the nick of time; and when he saw me inclined to be indignant that he had not first thought of protecting his friends' money, he gave me a confused explanation of how it was impossible to sell their shares without a power of attorney, which he had not had time to ask them for, and that, moreover, the sudden sale of too great a number of shares might have created a scare and made their values fall. I think I never despised him so thoroughly as that day; but I took care not to let him see it, and he could not suspect it, for everything he had said appeared so natural to him that he was unable to imagine that anyone in similar circumstances would not have acted exactly as he did.

6th July

I think it was Dr. Marchant who first made me realize that Gustave was like his father. All the illusions I so long nourished as regards Robert, I continued till a few months ago to have about Gustave . . . so difficult is it for us to judge a creature we love. As I fell out of love with Robert, I imagined I had become exceedingly perspicacious, and when I transferred my thoughts and hopes to Gustave, I began by saying to myself: "*He* at any rate . . ." For Robert's faults reappear in Gustave, but recast, so to speak; they manifest themselves differently, but now I recognize them. Though under a new aspect, they are the same; it is impossible to mistake them. And even certain traits of Robert's character are now made clear to me through observing them in his son. I do not like to see him at school neglecting everything in his studies which he is not afraid of being actually questioned about. He never learns anything out of the simple desire to learn and cares less about knowing a thing than about giving the impression he knows it. I have had great difficulty in checking a habit he had when he was very little of constantly asking apropos of everything: "What use is it?"—which I at first set down to a charming

curiosity. True, now he does not say it, but I would rather he did, for I know he is thinking it and that he despises everything that is of no *use*.

And to think that at first, simpleton that I was, I congratulated myself on his choice of companions. "Gustave will only make friends with the best boys," I said to Yvonne, and Marchant smiled. Last year, when I gave a children's party, at Gustave's request and by Robert's advice, we had a cabinet minister's son, a senator's nephew, a young count—in short, not a single child whose parents were not either exceptionally wealthy, powerful, or well known. Robert himself could not have chosen better. Gustave has indeed one other friend—a boy who has taken a scholarship. His parents are teachers; they are poor. Gustave gave me to understand that it would not be suitable to invite him with the others. At first I tried to imagine it was out of tactfulness. Now I think that Gustave was simply afraid his friend would put him to shame. He likes seeing him; but it is in order to dazzle him, to show his superiority. As for me, I prefer him to any of the others; he is the only one who seems to me to have any real personal value. He is a warm-hearted boy and adores Gustave, and when I see him in admiration over

his friend's sayings and doings, I feel inclined to warn him, to say: "My poor boy, don't deceive yourself. It is not you Gustave is fond of, it's your devotion."

"But, Mummy, it is such a pleasure to him to do things for me," Gustave answers when I reproach him for making his friend do something which he might easily have done for himself. "It amuses him, and it bores me." So that finally it is the other boy who thanks him.

9th July

The pleasure I take in covering the white pages of this book seems a very vain one, but it cannot be denied. And yet I let my pen carry me away less than formerly; I do not precisely take trouble to write well; but as I reflect more, it seems to me I write better. The best instruction I ever received was trying to instruct my children. In order to help them better to understand the authors they had to study at school, I tried first of all to understand them better myself, which is the reason that my tastes have greatly changed and that many books which formerly interested me I now find empty and insipid, whilst others, which I at first read as a task and in which I found nothing

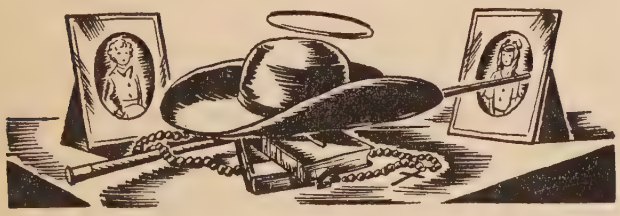
but tediousness, have grown to be full of life and light. The great writers of the past, in whom at first I saw nothing but fine language and frigid pomposity, have now allowed me to enter their intimacy so that I have made some among them my secret counsellors, my friends, and it is with them that I seek refuge, to them that I go to be cheered and consoled, which I sometimes have great need to be, for I feel terribly lonely.

11th July

Old Abbé Bredel, who has been at Bordeaux, where he was summoned by a family bereavement, came yesterday to spend the latter part of the day with me. He knows me so well; in the old days I got on so well with him . . . I confided my troubles to him, a thing I had not done for many a long day, for I have very much neglected my religious duties for a long time past. Robert's show of practising his, so to speak, disaffected my heart; the exhibition of his piety has made me doubt the sincerity of mine. The sight of his ostentatious genuflexions has dried up the springs of prayer in my heart. . . . But yesterday weakness, the sickness of solitude, the need of sympathy, drove me irresistibly to talk to the Abbé, who always taught me

to look on him more as a friend than as a priest. But at the end of our interview I felt beaten down, bewildered, discouraged, with as little confidence left in myself as in Robert.

The Abbé began by saying that it is not always the case that "speech cometh out of a full heart"; and, as in prayer the outward act often precedes the inward grace, I ought to accept the fact that with Robert the expression of a feeling is not always accompanied by the real feeling, and to hope that it shortly—that it eventually—would be. The important thing, according to the Abbé, is not that one should say what one thinks (for one often thinks what is wrong), but what one *ought* to think; for in the most natural way possible and almost in spite of oneself one ends by thinking what one has said. In short, he violently defended Robert, denied me all right to doubt his sincerity, and refused to see in my grief and what he called my



"selfish" complaints anything but a manifestation of the most lamentable pride—a pride which the neglect of my religious duties had fostered and developed. And gradually—so great is the empire the Abbé has assumed over me—I ceased to see at all clearly what it was I was complaining of, or to understand what I was reproaching Robert with. I was nothing but a recalcitrant, recriminating child. I protested through my sobs that I felt none of the rebelliousness which he saw in me, only a deep desire to devote myself—but to devote myself to something real, and that Robert's specious outside hid nothing but emptiness.

"Well," said he gravely and in a voice which had grown suddenly softer, "in that case, my child, your duty is to help him hide that emptiness . . . from all eyes," he added more gravely still, "and especially from your children's. It is of the utmost importance that they should continue to respect, to honour, their father. It is for you to help them by covering, hiding, and palliating his deficiencies. Yes, that is your duty as a Christian wife and mother; a duty you cannot shirk without impiety."

Half prostrated at his feet, my face covered with my hands, I tried to hide my sobs, my flushed cheeks, my

confusion. When I raised my head, I saw tears in his eyes, and felt in his heart a deep and sincere pity, which touched me more than his words had done. I said nothing; I found nothing to say; but he understood that I had submitted.

I have been very near tearing up all that I have written during the last few days; but no; I want to be able to reread it, if only to make me feel ashamed.

12th July

So, then, all that remains for me to do is to place myself at the service of a being for whom I have neither love nor esteem left; a being who will feel no gratitude for a sacrifice he is incapable of understanding and will not even notice; a being of whose mediocrity I have become aware too late; a lay-figure whose wife I am. That is my object, my lot, my *raison d'être;* and I have no other horizon left in life.

It was in vain that the Abbé pointed out the beauty of renouncement. "In the eyes of God," he said. And in the midst of my distress I suddenly realized that I had ceased to believe in God at the same time that I ceased to believe in Robert. The idea of seeing Robert again in another world—as the wretched recompense

of my fidelity—fills me with horror . . . a horror so great that my soul refuses the thought of eternal life. And if I am not more terrified by immortality, it is because I feel that I do not believe in it, that I no longer believe in it. Yesterday I spoke of submission; but it is not true; I feel nothing but despair, revolt, indignation. "Pride," said the Abbé. . . . Very well. Yes. I believe I am worth more than Robert; and the moment that I humble myself most before him will be the very moment when I shall be most conscious of my worth and feel the proudest. The Abbé warns me against the sin of pride, but does he not understand that on the contrary he is driving me into it and that the only motive he can appeal to of sufficient strength in me to evoke humility is the motive of pride?

Pride! Humility! I have repeated these words so often that I have ceased to understand them, as if my conversation with the Abbé had emptied them of all meaning. And there rises in me a thought which I repulse in vain, which has been torturing me since yesterday, and which discredits in my mind both the Abbé and everything he has been trying to convince me of—the thought that in reality the Church and he care only for the outside of things. The Abbé is very much better

pleased with a sham that is of service to him than with my sincerity, which disturbs and irks him. Robert has managed to gain him over, as he manages to nobble—frightful word—everybody. Praise for him—reprobation for me. Little he cares whether there is anything or not beneath the outward act. The outward act is enough for the Abbé; it is enough for everyone; and it is I who am foolish to refuse to content myself with it. What I seek for beyond it has no importance, no existence, no reality. Very well! Since it seems we must be satisfied with appearances, I will put on the appearance of humility, without feeling any real humility in my heart.

But this evening on my knees I cry to God in my distress, as I have not done for many years: "Dost Thou indeed exact this from me, O Lord?"

13th July

A terrifying telegram has just come from my father suddenly summoning me to Paris. Robert has had a motor accident—not serious, the telegram says, but yet I am wanted back. If Robert's state were very serious, my father would ask for Gustave to go back as well. This is what I say to reassure myself.

I am feeling frightful remorse for what I have written during the last few days. Fortunately Gustave is well enough for me to be able to leave him alone here for a few days without anxiety. The head of the pension has promised to look after him, and the doctor, who was here at the moment I received the telegram, has undertaken to send me a daily bulletin of his health. I am going back home therefore by the first train.

Paris, 14th July

Thank God, Robert is alive. Dr. Marchant and the surgeon declare there is no need for anxiety. But how can I help taking this accident as a warning from Heaven? Abbé Bredel, whom I found at Robert's bedside, said so to me at once. The wheel of the car which knocked him down, and which might have run over him, by some miracle only passed over his left arm, causing a double fracture of the upper arm, which will, however, be very easy to reduce, says Marchant.

What alarmed me most when I saw Robert, was a bandage which hid part of his face. But, according to Dr. Marchant, there is no damage there but a few insignificant contusions. Robert is, however, suffering from violent pains in the head, which he bears with

really admirable courage and resignation. After all I have already written, I must add that I was very anxious as to what he would say to me or rather as to the irritation I was afraid I might feel. But at his first words I felt I had not ceased to love him.

"I beg your pardon for all the trouble I am giving everyone," he said simply. And, as I bent over him, "No, don't kiss me; I am too ugly," he added, smiling in spite of his sufferings. I fell on my knees at the foot of the bed, weeping, and silently thanked God for not having heard my impious complaints, for having refused me the criminal liberty which I am ashamed of having desired . . . for which I beg God's forgiveness with all my heart.

I should feel more profoundly that God is putting my constancy to the test if the Abbé did not try so hard to convince me of it. It is his words now that arouse my antagonism at the very same time that elsewhere I am making submission; it is as though the spirit of rebellion, which I so imprudently harbour and which I now cast from me, had fallen back on this meagre prize. I leave it this bone to gnaw. But I understand today how right the Abbé was to accuse me of pride in my recent rebellious temper; it is indeed true

that there is a great deal of pride in the mean irritation I feel at hearing him preach to me a duty which I have accepted and which he has no longer any need to harp upon. I accuse myself of that too, O Lord, and I will humble myself to the point of taking example by Robert, whose merits I have misjudged.

Mamma has offered to look after Gustave for me and is leaving for Arcachon this evening.

16th July

Robert continues to complain of violent pains in the head; but the radiograph which was taken yesterday has completely reassured Marchant, who at first feared a fracture of the skull. As for his arm, he declares it is merely a matter of patience; in a month Robert will have recovered the use of it. I am reassured too. But alas! why should anxiety have been necessary to draw me near to Robert and call from him accents to which my heart can respond? I think he was afraid of dying, and no doubt it was that fear that, for the first time in his life, drew from him a genuine reaction. But now that he no longer has that apprehension, he has begun to *act* it and to invent sublime "last, dying words."

And now that I no longer have any anxiety about him, I observe all this coldly.

The sound of his own voice moves him to tears, and we should all be driven to shed them, too, if we did not know for certain that he was out of danger. He is too sharp, however, not to understand that with some of us his efforts are useless, so that he varies his effects in proportion to the amount of credit he feels he possesses. He hardly tries it on at all with Dr. Marchant, with whom he adopts the humorous attitude of an "*esprit fort.*" He reserves the pathetic line for the Abbé, who considers him "edifying," and for Papa, who considers him "antique" and goes out of the room stifling his sobs. I think he does not feel at his ease with me and seems afraid of giving himself away, for he makes a great effort to be simple, which, for him, is the most unnatural thing in the world. But I am astonished to see that there is one person with whom he is even more careful—and that is Geneviève. Yesterday at some of her father's words—which were not so very pompous—I saw a kind of smile hover on her lips —an ironical curl—and her eyes sought mine, though I immediately put as much severity into them as I could. We cannot prevent our children from judging us, but it

is intolerable to me for Geneviève to hope that I shall be in agreement with her spitefulness.

17th July

Marchant cannot exactly understand Robert's state, as he continues to complain of pains in his head; in reality, I am wrong in saying he complains, but every now and then he silently contracts his features and clenches his teeth, like someone in violent pain trying to control himself; and then if he is asked whether he is in pain, he makes a sign that he is; not even by nodding his head, but by what he no doubt thinks more eloquent, simply blinking his eyelids with the look of a person in the very act of expiring. Marchant maintains there is nothing the matter with him and, without positively saying so, remains somewhat sceptical as to the genuineness of these agonies—puzzled at any rate—and watchful. He has called a consultation with another doctor, who has discovered nothing further, and assures me there is no cause for anxiety. But I feel that Robert does not like being reassured, or, rather, he dislikes *our* being reassured. "Man's science is highly precarious," he said oracularly after the doctor had gone, adding, so as to be more impressive: "And this

is why the most learned men are the most modest." But yesterday he refused to take any food, closed his door to troublesome visitors, of whom there are a great many, and this morning asked that my mother and Gustave should be sent for back from Arcachon. A telegram tells us to expect them this evening.

The difficulty for Robert consists in avoiding celebrated last words; he is perfectly aware of this and therefore speaks little. One has not got an unlimited supply of sublime and original sayings always at hand. But one of his latest inventions is to take up a highly depreciatory tone about himself. This is marvellously successful with the Abbé, who takes it all for Christian humility and contrition. When Robert sees him at his bedside: "This is the moment," he murmurs shutting his eyes, "to compare the little good one has done with all the good one might have done." Then, as we all remain silent, he goes on: "I have bestirred myself a great deal—and for very little"; then turning his head toward the Abbé: "Let us hope that God does not measure man's effort by the smallness of the results he obtains."

At this moment I pour him out a dose of some calming medicine; after which he goes on again:

"Running water is a bad mirror; but when water is still, one can see one's face in it."

Then he stops to take a breath, turns to the wall as if to avert his eyes from a sight that is too abject, and starts afresh in a louder voice and in a tone of reproach, grief, disgust, scorn, and deep desolation.

"I see in it nothng but foolishness, spite, conceit. . . ."

The Abbé interrupts him:

"Come, come, my friend; God, who reads the secrets of all hearts, will be able to see other things as well."

As for me, alas! all *I* can see in it is play-acting.

18th July

Mamma came back last night with Gustave. Before receiving his son, Robert desired to make a little toilet; but he insisted on keeping on the useless bandage which covers half his forehead. Under pretence that the lamp tired his eyes, he had it placed in such a way that his face was in shadow. Papa had gone down to see my mother and Gustave in the drawing-room and to give them the very reassuring news; Geneviève stayed with me in the room, as well as Charlotte, who was putting away the toilet things. We looked as if

we were preparing a *tableau vivant*. When everything was ready, Genveiève called the others in.

It would have been the natural thing for Gustave to run up to the bed and give his father a kiss; but this was too simple for his father's taste. He kept his eyes shut and his face had taken on such a majestic expression that Gustave stopped, petrified. Papa and Mamma followed him into the room. Robert began:

"Closer, closer, for I feel very weak."

He opened one eye and saw Charlotte, who made as though to retire discreetly.

"No, no, my dear Charlotte, there is no reason you should go."

After all the last words we have had lately, I was rather curious to see what more he would be able to invent, but paternal affection might afford a fresh theme. So, addressing himself especially to Geneviève and Gustave, who like well-trained actors had drawn close to his bedside, he began:

"My children, it is your turn now to take up the torch which . . ."

But he was not able to finish his sentence. Geneviève, as though she could not contain herself, suddenly interrupted him, in a clear, almost playful voice:

"Why, Father, you talk as if you were going to leave us. And you are nearly well, you know; you will be able to get up in a few days. You see Charlotte is the only person you have succeeded in making cry. Anyone coming into the room would think she was the only person who had any heart."

"Master Gustave can see that his Papa is crying too," said Charlotte (and in fact the tears were running down Robert's cheeks as he spoke); then going a little nearer to the bed, and encouraged by our silence, she went on:

"If you are feeling so weak, sir, perhaps it's just because you want a little something. I'll go and fetch you some beef-tea."

After which there was nothing left for Robert to do but to inquire whether Mamma had had a good journey and whether Gustave had liked Arcachon.

# PART THREE

19th July 1914

Geneviève does not like her father. How is it I have remained so long without perceiving this? No doubt because I have of late given her very little attention. All my thoughts and care have been centred on Gustave, whose health is delicate. I admit, too, that he interested me more; he is somewhat of a charmer, like his father, and I recognize in him all the qualities that captivated me so in Robert—until they so greatly disappointed me. As for Geneviève, I thought she was completely absorbed in her studies and indifferent to everything else. Now I have reached the point of wondering whether I did right in encouraging her so much. I have just had a terrible conversation with her. I see now that she is the one person with whom I might come to an understanding, but at the same time I see why I do not *wish* to come to an understanding with her. It is because I am afraid of coming face to face in her with my own thoughts—but my own thoughts grown bolder—grown so bold that they terrify me. All the fears, all the doubts, that have sometimes

tortured me have turned in her into so many brazen negations. No, no; I will not be a party to recognizing them. I cannot admit that she should speak of her father with such disrespect; but when I tried to shame her, "Oh! I say!" she cried, "as if you took him seriously yourself!" She flung the words in my face so brutally that I felt myself blush; I was incapable of answering her; incapable of hiding my confusion from her. Then she immediately declared that she could not admit that marriage should confer all the prerogatives on the husband; that for her part she would never consent to submit to such a thing; she was quite determined to make the man she fell in love with her partner, her companion and by far the most sensible thing would be not to marry him. My example was a warning; it put her on her guard; on the other hand, she could not thank me enough for having given her an education which enabled her to judge us, to live a life of her own and not bind herself to a person who might very likely be her inferior. As she was walking excitedly up and down the room, I sat listening in extreme dejection to the cynicism of her talk. I begged her to lower her voice, as I was afraid her father might hear her.

'Let him hear us!" she cried. "I am quite ready to repeat to him everything I have been saying; you can repeat it yourself. Repeat it. Yes, yes; repeat it."

She seemed to have lost all control of herself. I left the room. All this took place only a few hours ago.

20th July

Yes, this took place yesterday before dinner. And at dinner Geneviève was no doubt touched at seeing the sadness I was unable to conceal. She came to my room in the evening, and flinging herself into my arms like a child, she began to stroke my face and kiss me as she used to long ago, and so tenderly that it made me cry.

"Darling Mummy," she said, "I made you unhappy just now. Don't be too cross with me. But you see I can't pretend with you. I can't. I won't tell lies to you. I know you could understand me. And I understand you much better than you want me to. I must talk to you more. There are things, you see, which you have taught me to think and which you don't dare think yourself; things which you believe you still believe and which I know that I don't believe at all."

I kept silent, for I did not dare ask her what things; and then she suddenly asked me whether it was because of her and Gustave that I had remained faithful to their father? "For I am quite certain that you have remained faithful to him," she added, looking me fixedly in the face as one looks at a child one is reprimanding. However monstrous I thought this reversal of our roles, I protested that the idea of deceiving my husband had never entered my head for a moment; then she said she knew quite well that I had been in love with Bourgweilsdorf.

"If so, it was without my being aware of it," I retorted curtly.

But she went on: "You may not have owned it to yourself, but *he* was aware of it all right, I am certain."

I had risen, for I wanted to get away from her, to leave the room if she went on talking in this way; in any case I was determined not to answer her any more. There was a short silence, and then I sat down again, or, rather, sank into another chair, for I felt too exhausted to stand up. She immediately flung herself once more into my arms, sat on my knee, and became more caressing than ever:

"But, Mummy, do understand that I don't blame

you." And as these words made me start with indignation, she took hold of my two arms and held me a prisoner, laughing as though to lessen the intolerable impropriety of her words by making fun of them.

"I should just like to know," she went on, "whether there has been any sacrifice on your part."

She had once more become very serious; as for me, I did my best to keep an impassive countenance; she understood that I should not answer, and went on:

"What a good novel you might help me to write! It would be called 'The Duties of a Mother, or The Useless Sacrifice.'" And as I continued silent, she began to shake her head slowly. "No," she said, "it's not because you have made yourself the slave of your duty . . ." then she corrected herself, "of an imaginary duty. . . . No, no; you can see for yourself that I can't be grateful to you for that. No; don't protest. I really think I couldn't go on loving you if I felt under an obligation to you—if I felt that you *thought* I was under an obligation to you. Your virtue is your own; I do not choose to feel myself bound by it." Then suddenly changing her tone: "Now, quickly, say something, anything, so that when I go back to my room I mayn't be furious with myself for having

spoken to you so." I felt mortally sad and was only able to put a kiss on her forehead.

I did not sleep last night. Geneviève's sentences re-echoed through the frightful emptiness of my heart. Ah! I ought not to have let her speak. For at present I do not know whether it was her voice that spoke or mine. But now that I have allowed it to raise itself, will it ever again be silent? If I am not more frightened, it is because my cowardice reassures me. My mind revolts in vain; in spite of myself I remain submissive. I ask myself in vain what else I could have done in life; in spite of myself I still remain attached to Robert, to my children, who are his children. I look round for some way of escape; but I know well enough that if I had the liberty I long for, I should not know what to do with it. And the words Geneviève once said to me in fun sound like a knell in my ears:

"It's no good, my poor Mummy; you'll never be anything but an honest woman."

22nd July

I will write down my thoughts without order, as they come. . . .

My children's respect held me back and I liked to

lean upon it. Geneviève has robbed me of this support. I have no longer even that to help me. At present it is with myself alone that I fight; it is of my own virtue that I am the irremediable prisoner.

If even I had any grievance against my husband! But no; those defects of his from which I suffer and which I have come to hate are not directed against me, and the only thing I can reproach him with is his very being; I feel he loves me as much as he is capable of loving and I am bound by his fidelity. Not that any other love tempts me; I have no thought of betraying him—at any rate not otherwise than by going away. Oh! all I want is to leave him. . . .

If only he were an invalid! If only he could not do without me! How can I renounce life before I am forty? Will not God grant me some duties other than this mortal effacement and wretched resignation?

What advice can I hope for? And who is to give it to me? My parents are lost in admiration of Robert and think I am perfectly happy. Why should I undeceive them? What can I hope for from them except perhaps pity, which I have no use for?

Abbé Bredel is too old to understand me. And indeed what could he say more to me than he said at Arcachon

—and even then it merely increased my unhappiness—that I must do all in my power to hide their father's inferiority from the children? As if . . . But I will not speak to him of the conversation I have just had with Geneviève. It would only strengthen the opinion he has of her, which is not a good one; and I know that at the first words he uttered, I should take Geneviève's side. As for her, she never could bear the Abbé, and all I could ever obtain from her was that she should not be impertinent to him.

Marchant? . . . Yes, no doubt, *he* would understand me. He would understand me only too well. That is why I cannot speak to him. And then I could not forgive myself for disturbing Yvonne's happiness. I am too fond of her not to hide the truth from her.

But as I write this, an idea has suddenly dawned upon me—an absurd idea perhaps, but none the less I feel it to be imperative—the person I must speak to about Robert is Robert himself. My mind is made up. I will speak to him this very evening.

23rd July

Yesterday evening as I was preparing to go to Robert's room for the explanation that I had deter-

mined to have with him, Papa was announced. It is so unusual for him to come at such a late hour that my first impulse was to exclaim:

"Is anything the matter with Mamma?"

"Your Mamma is perfectly well," he answered, and then as he pressed me in his arms, he went on: "*You* are the one who isn't well, my dear. No, no, no, don't deny it. I've been feeling for a long time past that something is amiss. . . . My poor little Eveline, I can't bear to feel that you are unhappy."

I began by saying:

"Everything is all right, Papa. What makes you think . . . ?"

But I had to stop, for he put his two hands on my shoulder and looked at me so searchingly that I felt I was losing countenance.

"Those black rings round your eyes tell a very different story. Come, my darling. . . . My dear little Eveline, why don't you tell me? Is Robert deceiving you?"

This question was so unexpected that I exclaimed stupidly and as if in spite of myself:

"Oh! I wish to goodness he were! . . ."

"What! . . . It's something serious, then? Come, come, tell me. What's the matter?"

He was so pressing that I could restrain myself no longer:

"No, Robert is not deceiving me," I said. "I have nothing to reproach him with; and that's the very thing that is so dreadful." And as I saw that he did not understand:

"Do you remember that at first you disliked my marriage? I asked you then what you objected to in Robert, and I was indignant when you found nothing to answer. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why, my dear little girl, I really don't know. It's such a long time ago. . . . Yes, I misjudged Robert at first. I disliked his ways. Happily, I soon understood that I was mistaken. . . ."

"Oh, Papa! unfortunately you were right in your first judgment of him. You thought you were mistaken afterwards because I was happy with him. But it didn't last. It was my turn to understand. No, you were not mistaken. I ought to have listened to you at first, as I used to when I was a good little girl."

He stayed for a long time as if utterly overcome, shaking his head and murmuring: "You poor little thing! . . . you poor little thing!" so tenderly that I was miserable at causing him so much dis-

tress. But I had to go on. Plucking up my courage, I said:

"I want to leave him."

He gave a violent start and exclaimed: "Hey-day! Hey-day!" in such an odd tone of voice that I should have laughed if I had had the heart to. Then he made me sit down close beside him on the sofa, stroking my hair as he spoke:

"Your Abbé would look rather queer if you did such a silly thing as that. Have you talked to him about it?"

I nodded my head to signify I had and then was obliged to confess that I did not get on so well with the Abbé nowadays as I used to, which made him smile and give me a little mocking glance. The idea of this indirect victory over a person he could never abide seemed to amuse him very much.

"Dear! dear! dear!" Then changing his tone he went on: "Let's talk seriously, my child—that is to say, practically."

Then he explained that if I left my husband's domicile, all the blame would attach to me.

"People as a rule only understand the value of a good reputation after they have lost it. Where would

you go? What would you do? My little Eveline was always one to have rather chimerical ideas, wasn't she? No, no, you must go on living with Robert. Take him all in all, he is not a bad fellow. If you try to have an explanation with him, perhaps he might understand . . ."

"He won't understand; but I'll speak to him all the same, and it'll only tighten the noose round my neck."

Then he went on to say that I must not try to escape, but to establish a *modus vivendi*, to find a working compromise. He likes using rather imposing words as though to prove to himself that they don't frighten him. (I realize that this is very spiteful.) Then, no doubt with the intention of consoling me, he began to speak to me of my mother and tell me that he had not found all he had hoped for in marriage either. He had never confided this to anyone, he told me, and he seemed extraordinarily relieved at being able at last to let himself go—which he did to his heart's content. I had not the courage to interrupt him, but his confidences made me feel inexpressibly uncomfortable—as uncomfortable as in my dreadful conversation with Geneviève. It seems to me that it is not a good thing

that communications of this kind should take place from one generation to another—that they do violence in one or other of them to a feeling of intimate reserve which it is no doubt better to respect.

My feeling of discomfort had yet another reason which I dislike mentioning, for I am too fond of Papa not to be sorry to have to judge him and I wish I need never think he was in the wrong—a reason about which I should keep silent if I had not promised myself to be sincere in these pages. When Papa began to talk to me of his youthful ambitions and of everything he thinks he might have done if he had felt himself better understood and better seconded by my mother, I could not refrain from thinking that it only rested with him to have got more out of himself, and that if he failed to make the most of his intelligence and his gifts, it was not disagreeable to him to believe that Mamma was responsible for this. I do not doubt that he has suffered from Mamma's wholly practical and narrow-minded point of view; but I think he is rather pleased to be able to say: "Your mother doesn't wish . . . Your mother doesn't think . . ." and to rest content with that.

He told me afterwards he did not know a single

married couple whose union was so perfect that one of the parties had not sometimes wished never to have contracted it. I did not protest, for Papa does not like being contradicted, but I cannot accept such a statement, which seems to me a blasphemy.

Our conversation lasted till far on into the night. Papa was, I believe, greatly cheered by it and did not understand that he left me more deeply in despair than ever.

24th July

A running noose . . . and every effort I make to free myself only serves to tighten it. . . . My final explanation with Robert has taken place. I have played my last card and lost. Ah! I should have gone away without saying a word to Papa or to anyone. I can do no more. I am beaten.

I found Robert lying on the sofa, for he began to to leave his bed a few days ago.

"I came to see whether you wanted anything," I said, trying to think of some way of starting the conversation.

"No, thank you, dear," he answered in his most angelic voice. "I feel really better this evening and I

am beginning to think that after all the angel of death has passed me by this time." Then, as he never misses an opportunity of showing his generosity, his sensibility, his greatness of soul: "I have given you a great deal of anxiety. I wish I was certain I deserved all the care that has been lavished on me."

I tried to look at him with indifference.

"Robert, I should like to have a serious conversation with you."

"You know very well, my dear, that I never refuse to speak seriously. When one has seen death at such close quarters as I have in the last few days, one is naturally inclined to have serious thoughts."

But I suddenly ceased to understand what I was complaining of and what I had come to say. Or, to be more accurate, what I was complaining of suddenly seemed to me impossible to formulate. And, above all, I could think of no sentence, no question, by which I could start; I was still, however, firmly resolved to engage in the struggle and repeated to myself until my brain seemed in a whirl: "If I don't do it now, I shall never do it." Then I thought that it probably did not much matter with what sentence I began the attack, and that the best thing would be to trust to a kind of

inspiration which could not fail eventually to come to my help.

So, like a diver who plunges, eyes shut, into the abyss, "Robert," I said, "I should like you to tell me, if you still remember, what reason you had for marrying me."

Certainly he expected a question of this kind so little that for a moment he looked completely taken aback. For a moment only, for, whatever may be the situation in which circumstances place him, Robert is always extraordinarily prompt and clever at recovering himself. He reminds me of those little toy tumblers with pith heads which, however one throws them down, always settle again on their feet.

While he was looking at me to try to understand what purpose was hidden in my words, so as to adapt his defence to meet them, "What makes you speak of reason," he asked, "about a matter of feeling?"

Robert always manages to get the upper hand of his adversary. Whatever one does, the point of view in which he places himself immediately seems the superior one. I felt, as at a game of chess, that I should lose the advantage of the attack if I answered; it would be better to put him again on the defensive.

"Please try to speak to me simply."

He protested immediately:

"It is impossible to speak more simply."

It was true and I at once felt the imprudence of my words. They were full of an old grudge which had, no doubt, had time to grow big in my heart; but this once there was no ground for it.

"Yes, you say that simply. But as a rule your loftiness is overwhelming; you like to take refuge in regions so sublime that you know I shall never be able to follow you there."

"It seems to me, my dear," he said, smiling affably and in his sweetest tone of voice, "that for the moment it is you who are not being simple. Won't you tell me straight out what the matter is? You have something to reproach me with; I am listening."

But now it was I who was assuming Robert's manner, Robert's way of expressing himself, which has become so unbearable to me—just as, when I was younger, I used to put on an English accent out of sympathy when I was talking to an English person, to Papa's great amusement. Was it for the same reason that Robert, when he spoke to me, found himself as though forced to speak simply, while I irresistibly adopted his tone

and his style? I plunged deeper and deeper into the bog.

"If I could only reproach you with anything definite, what a relief it would be!" I managed to say. "But no! I know only too well that you never put yourself in the wrong—as I did just now, when I began to explain myself. And yet I assure you I am not giving way to a thoughtless impulse. This conversation that I have been meaning to have for such a long time past and that I have been putting off from day to day . . ." I could not finish my sentence—it was too long already. I went on in so low a voice that I was surprised he could hear me:

"Listen, Robert. It's simply that I can't go on living with you any longer."

In order to have strength to say this—even in a whisper—I had been obliged to stop looking at him. But as he was silent, I raised my eyes. I thought he had turned pale.

"If I were to ask you in my turn what reason you have for leaving me, you might answer like me, that it's a matter of feeling not of reason."

"I don't say so," I answered.

But he: "Eveline, am I to understand that you don't love me any more?"

His voice trembled just enough to leave me in doubt as to whether his emotion was sincere or feigned. I made a great effort and said painfully:

"The man I passionately loved was different from the man I have slowly discovered you to be."

He raised his eyebrows and shoulders:

"If you speak in riddles . . ."

I went on:

"I have gradually discovered that you are very different from what I thought you were at first—from the man I once loved."

Then something extraordinary happened: I saw him suddenly put his head in his hands and burst into sobs. There could be no question of feigning; they were real sobs which shook his whole body; real tears which wetted his fingers and ran down his cheeks, whilst he repeated wildly a dozen times over:

"My wife doesn't love me! My wife doesn't love me!"

I was far from expecting this explosion. It struck me dumb—not that I was much moved myself, for it is obvious that I do not love Robert. I was indignant, on the contrary, at seeing him have recourse to weapons which I thought disloyal; I was uncomfortable

too at feeling that I was the cause of a real grief, before which my grievances must needs give way. In order to console Robert I should have had to make use of lying protestations. I drew near him and put my hand on his head, which he raised at once.

"But why should I have married you, then? Was it for your name, your fortune, your parents' situation? Was it? Was it? Say something so that I may understand. You know . . . you know . . . that I . . ."

He seemed at present so natural, so perfectly sincere, that I expected to hear him say: "that I might have found a much better match . . ." but the words that came were: "that it was because I loved you;" then, in a voice once more broken with sobs: ". . . and because I thought . . . that . . . you loved me."

I was almost shocked by my own indifference. However sincere Robert's emotion now was, the exhibition of that emotion froze me.

"I thought I should be the only one to suffer from this explanation," I began; but he interrupted me.

"You say I am not the man you thought. But, then, *you* are not the woman I thought, either. How is it possible ever to know if one really is the person one thinks one is?"

EAW

It is a habit of his to seize hold of other people's ideas and twist them round so as to serve his own purposes (I really think he does it quite unconsciously); so he went on:

"But not one of us, you poor dear, not one of us can constantly keep on the heights where he would wish to be. The whole drama of our moral life is just that—exactly that. I don't know whether you follow me . . ."

(He has an invariable trick of saying these words whenever he begins to change his subject and realizes that his interlocutor is aware of it.) . . . "It is only people without an ideal . . ."

"Robert, Robert," I said gently, with a restraining movement of my hand, for I knew that, once started on such an elevated theme, he would never stop of his own accord. My interruption made him slightly shift his ground.

"As if one was not always forced to climb down a little in life! . . . I mean one is always forced to bring one's ideal down to somewhere within one's reach. But as for you, your ideals have always been chimerical."

(So, then, it must be true, since Papa said the same thing yesterday.) Then, with a natural rebound, he

soared up again into the lofty regions from which my egotistical sigh had impertinently snatched him.

"And there, my dear, you touch upon a problem of the highest interest—the problem of expression itself. The question is, you see, whether emotion exhausts itself in the expression of emotion, or whether, on the contrary, it is called into being by the expression, comes, as it were, to *inform* the expression. And indeed one almost begins to doubt whether anything exists in reality apart from its appearance, and whether . . . Let me just explain; you'll understand in a minute."

This last sentence always comes to the rescue when he begins to get confused. It irritates me more than anything.

"I understand perfectly well," I interrupted. "You mean it would be mad of me to mind whether you really feel all the fine feelings you express."

His glance grew suddenly charged with a kind of hatred.

"Oh!" he exclaimed in a voice that was almost strident, "it's a pleasure indeed to be understood by you. So that is the only impression our conversation has left on you. I let myself go; I speak to you with more confidence and frankness than I have ever done to

anyone; I humble myself before you; I burst into tears before you; but my tears don't touch you; you put your own interpretation on my words, and in an icy tone you give me to understand that all the feeling is on your side, and that all my love for you is nothing but . . ."

He was again interrupted for a moment by his sobs. I rose with only one thought in my head—to put an end to an interview which I had conducted so badly, which was ending in my discomfiture, and in which I had only succeeded in putting myself to all appearance entirely in the wrong. As I laid my hand on his arm to say good-bye, he turned round abruptly and the words burst from him:

"No, I say, no, no. It isn't true. You are wrong. If you still loved me in the least, you would understand that I am only a poor creature struggling like all of us and trying as best he can to become a little better than he is."

He had suddenly found the words most capable of touching me. I bent over him to kiss him, but he pushed me away almost brutally.

"No, no. Let me alone. I can only see, only feel, one thing—that you have ceased to love me."

On these words I left him, my heart weighed down with a fresh unhappiness—an unhappiness which confronts his own, which his own has revealed to me. Alas! he loves me still, and I cannot leave him.

## EPILOGUE

. . . . 1916

I had resolved to write nothing more in this book. Very shortly after the conversation with Robert which I have related in the last pages, our personal preoccupations were swept away by the terrible events which have overwhelmed Europe. I wish I could recover the convictions of my childhood so that I might pray God with all my heart to protect France. But I imagine the Christians of Germany pray the same God in the same way for their country, in spite of everything we hear about them which might make us think them barbarians. It is in the virtue and valour of each and all of us, such as we are, that France must find her protection and defence. I thought at first that Robert was profoundly convinced of this. I witnessed his grief at being unable to serve on account of his convalescence; and a few months later I know that he consulted Marchant as to how he could get a medical certificate to allow of his enlisting. Unfortunately, I learned soon after that his class was about to be called up, that he ran the risk of being transferred from the auxiliary to

the active army, and that by enlisting beforehand he would be free to choose the branch of the service he preferred—which he did with the utmost precaution and with the help of all the interest he could command. Why repeat all this here? I wish only to relate the dreadful scene I have just had with him, which has made me take my final decision. But how can I explain this without referring to the fresh medical board which he had to go up to, where he managed to get himself discharged as suffering from "chronic cephalalgia resulting from traumatism"? It was then that I determined to engage myself in one of the hospitals at the front, where I was certain of having my services accepted; but Robert's permission and signature were necessary. He refused them me brutally, with many hard words, saying that I only wanted to go in order to mortify him, to set him an example, to shame him . . . . I was obliged to give in—to wait—and finally to content myself with a hospital in Paris, where I often spent the night, so that I saw him only very rarely. I was astounded one morning to find him again in military costume. Thanks to his knowledge of English, he had succeeded in being taken on by an American War Relief Committee, and this enabled him to wear uniform

without being actually in the army, and to assume a martial air. But poor Robert had no luck; his patriotic speeches soon led to his being selected for service at Verdun. As it was impossible to get out of this decently, he thought it "his duty" to put a good face on it, so much so that he was shortly given the *croix de guerre*, to the great admiration of Gustave, my parents, and quantities of friends, who went into ecstasies. At Verdun itself, where he sent for me to go and see him, he managed to pass as a hero. I think he was merely waiting for this decoration to get sent home, which, thanks to the interest he possesses, he was able to do without much difficulty. As I expressed surprise at this sudden return, which agreed very ill with the fine speeches about constancy and fortitude I heard him make a short time ago at Verdun itself, he explained that he knew for certain, from an unimpeachable source, that the war was on the point of coming to an end, and that he felt he could at present be more useful in Paris, where the morale appeared to him less good than on the front.

This was two days ago . . . and yet I uttered no reproaches. Since our painful explanation I accept

everything without saying a word. It is not so much his actions that I despise as the reasons he gives for them. Perhaps he read my contempt in my eyes. He suddenly became resentful. His decoration no longer allows him to doubt the authenticity of his virtues and at the same time permits him to dispense with them. I, who have no *croix de guerre*, have need of virtue itself, for its own sake, and not for the approbation it brings us. "Chimerical" creature that I am, I have need of reality. . . .

After having naïvely congratulated himself on having come through the war at so small a cost, and seeing that I could not repress a smile; "As if you wouldn't have done exactly the same thing yourself!" he suddenly exclaimed.

No, Robert, I cannot allow you to say this; I cannot, above all, allow you to think it. I did not answer, but my mind was instantly made up. I managed to see Marchant that same evening and settle everything with him. He was good enough to take the necessary steps for me. Tomorrow I shall go off quietly to the hospital at Châtellerault; it is behind the lines and I shall have the appearance of being in perfect safety, which is what I want. Geneviève is the only person who knows the

truth. How did she find out the kind of illness that is nursed there? I do not know. . . . She implored me to let her come too and take service at my side. But I cannot endure that she should expose herself to such risks; she has all her life before her. "No, Geneviève, you cannot, you must not follow where I am going," I said, kissing her very tenderly, as though to say good-bye. My dear Geneviève is not satisfied with appearances either. I love her dearly. I am writing this for her to read. It is to her that I bequeath this book in case I do not return . . . I almost hope I shall not, for I hold very cheap a life that is only a pretence of living.

*No writer living today has caused such storms of discussion as André Gide and few have reached such eminence. In the course of an active career which reaches back into the last century he has always managed to be a step ahead of the succeeding sets of moderns and perhaps the most remarkable thing about his books is that not one of them dates. There are few surer tests of genius. His first great success in America came in 1927 with the publication of* The Counterfeiters *and since then there has been an ever-growing interest here in a writer whose distinguished and versatile gifts were long ago recognized throughout Europe.*

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